

SAN JOSE JAPANTOWN HISTORIC CONTEXT AND RECONNAISSANCE SURVEY
San Jose, California

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Appendix F: Traditional Cultural Properties

TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PROPERTIES

Introduction

As mentioned earlier in this report, Carey & Co.'s scope of work for this project was limited to the preparation of a historic context and the undertaking of a reconnaissance survey. This project did not include the building-specific archival research essential to a conclusive determination of historic significance at the district or individual property level. This said, when Carey & Co. combined the research for the historic context with observations made during the reconnaissance survey, it became clear that part of San Jose's Japantown neighborhood may be eligible for official designation in a number of different ways, including on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) as a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) historic district.

Since there is not a lot of information generally available on TCPs, and because the TCP guidelines have never been applied in an Asian American context, Carey & Co. has written the following document to explain what a TCP is and how to determine if a TCP exists. Carey & Co. has also provided two recommendations specifically tailored to a potential TCP designation effort, which are intended to augment the general recommendations provided in the "Recommendations" section of the report.

The first attempt to define TCPs and provide a formal NRHP listing process came in 1990 with the publication of NRHP Bulletin No. 38, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties*. Revisions occurred in 1992 and 1998. In 2003, one of the co-authors of the Bulletin, Thomas F. King, wrote *Places that Count: Traditional Cultural Properties in Cultural Resource Management*, which expands on the examples and processes outlined in Bulletin No. 38. Both documents were used in the preparation of this section.

An Introduction to Traditional Cultural Properties

A TCP is a place that is important because of the role it plays in the cultural practices or beliefs of a living community. As long as there is a substantive connection between a place and a culture, TCPs can be districts, sites, buildings, structures, or objects. Examples of TCPs include Native American cultural and religious sites, urban and rural communities in which patterns of building or land use reflect traditional values, and places associated with practices that maintain a particular community's cultural identity.

When attempting to identify a TCP, there are a number of things to keep in mind:

1. *A TCP must have an actual physical location.* This is important because under current American preservation practices, only places can be listed on the NRHP—not important people or intangible entities such as social customs. Places that are associated with

important people or intangible entities can be listed on the NRHP, but not the people or intangible entities themselves.

2. *The cultural practices or beliefs associated with a place must qualify as “traditional,”* that is, they must have been passed down through the generations. Because time is essential to this definition, any cultural practice or belief that has developed in the last 50 years is not old enough to qualify as traditional.

3. *There must be a living community who values the traditional cultural practices and beliefs associated with a place.* While there must be a group alive today that can communicate its feelings about their traditional cultural practices, these customs do not have to be observed at the time the TCP is evaluated.

4. *The group that values the property must feel that it has integrity of relationship and integrity of condition.* The term “integrity of relationship” refers to the connection between the place and the customs and/or beliefs that give it significance. The term “integrity of condition” refers to the ability of the place to continue to play a role in the customs and/or beliefs that give it significance. In both cases, a potential TCP’s integrity must be considered from the point of view of the practitioners of the traditional culture, rather than the person(s) attempting to identify the TCP.

5. *A TCP must be historically significant under at least one of the NRHP Criteria for Evaluation: association with significant events (Criterion A) or persons (Criterion B) in our past, architectural distinction (Criterion C), and/or potential to yield important information (Criterion D).* For Criteria A & B, the term “our past” can refer to the history of the group that values the potential TCP.

6. *The NRHP Criteria Considerations should be taken into account.* The standard NRHP evaluation process includes a review of seven special circumstances that generally automatically disqualify properties from NRHP listing, referred to collectively as the “Criteria Considerations.” Evaluation for significance as a TCP does not remove this requirement. If a potential TCP falls under one of the Criteria Considerations, it is highly likely that the property will not be NRHP eligible.

San Jose’s Japantown: An Argument for TCP Designation

Carey & Co. was unable to locate a single previously listed TCP important for its association with an Asian American community. In our search for precedent, we consulted with the following highly informed cultural resource professionals: Thomas F. King, author of a number of Cultural Resource Management documents including Bulletin No. 38 and *Places that Count*; Paul R. Lusignan, NRHP historian; Antoinette J. Lee, program manager of the National Park Service’s Office of Diversity and Special Projects; and Gail Dubrow, director of the Preservation Planning and Design Program at the University of Washington and author of *Sento at Sixth and Main: Preserving Landmarks of Japanese American Heritage*. According to these specialists, the lack of

Asian American TCPs on the NRHP does not signal an inherent lack of historic significance; rather, it may come from lack of specialized knowledge about TCPs and/or the prohibitively long and expensive nomination process. Each specialist expressed enthusiasm for the project and encouraged San Jose's Japantown community to undertake a nomination effort if that is what is deemed the best course of action.

Based on Carey & Co.'s historic context research and reconnaissance survey, it is our opinion that San Jose's Japantown neighborhood meets all of the TCP requirements. The following is a summary of why we believe this is the case:

1. *A TCP must have an actual physical location.* San Jose's Japantown is centered along East Jackson Street, roughly between North 4th and North 6th Streets. The area consists of a collection of existing buildings with a shared connection to the city's Japanese American cultural history. The exact boundaries of the TCP will be determined after building-specific archival research has been completed and the district's contributing resources have been identified.
2. *The cultural practices or beliefs associated with a place must qualify as "traditional."* Japanese immigrants came to the San Jose area beginning in the late 19th century and established a community based on traditional Japanese cultural practices and beliefs. For more than 100 years, these customs have been passed down through the generations to the present day.
3. *There must be a living community who values the traditional cultural practices and beliefs associated with a place.* San Jose contains a thriving Japanese American community today. It is possible to speak with members of this community to ascertain how they feel about the cultural traditions associated with Japantown.
4. *The group that values the property must feel that it has integrity of relationship and integrity of condition.* Based on conversations with community members, Carey & Co. believes that San Jose's Japanese Americans perceive a very strong connection between their cultural history and the history of Japantown. They have indicated that in their opinion the addition, demolition, and alteration of some of the neighborhood's buildings does not prevent the area from serving its purpose as the commercial and cultural center of their community.
5. *A TCP must be historically significant under at least one of the NRHP Criteria for Evaluation: association with significant events (Criterion A) or persons (Criterion B) in our past, architectural distinction (Criterion C), and/or potential to yield important information (Criterion D).*

Criterion A: San Jose's Japantown neighborhood appears to be historically significant under NRHP Criterion A, association with significant events in our past. In this case, "our past" is used to refer to history from the point of view of San Jose's Japanese American community. There are two historical events that are particularly important to

Japanese Americans in San Jose, the establishment of a permanent community in the Santa Clara Valley based in traditional Japanese cultural practices and beliefs and the re-establishment of this community in the same place after World War II. As the physical and cultural focal point of these events, Japantown's role is unequivocally and inextricably associated with San Jose's Japanese American past. Contributors to a TCP district would be those resources that are associated with the establishment of the original Japanese American presence in Japantown and/or the re-establishment of the Japanese American community in the post-internment era.

Criterion B: An argument could be made for Japantown as a TCP to be historically significant under Criterion B, association with persons important to our past. As with Criterion A, "our past" is used in this case to refer to history from the point of view of San Jose's Japanese American community. There were a number of families that have played important roles in the traditional cultural practices and beliefs that are associated with Japantown. This is particularly true with regard to the Dobashis and others who contributed to the development of the neighborhood's Japanese-oriented commercial zone. However, Criterion B may become more relevant after the building-specific archival research phase has been completed. At that time, more information will be known about how particular people or families are connected to the area's traditional cultural practices and beliefs. It is also possible that after this research is finished, individual buildings may be considered NRHP eligible under Criterion B independent of the larger Japantown TCP effort. The Mineta House, for example, may be historically significant not necessarily for its connection to the neighborhood's overall Japanese American traditional cultural history but rather for its association with Norman Mineta, a prominent San Jose-based public servant.

Criterion C: At this phase in the project it is unclear if Japantown is important under Criterion C, architectural distinction. With the notable exception of the Buddhist Church, architectural expression of Japanese American identity has played almost no role in the history of the Japantown neighborhood. However, the building-specific archival research phase may provide information regarding a connection between the community's cultural traditions and its overall patterns of design and construction.

Criterion D: San Jose's Japantown neighborhood does not appear to be NRHP eligible under Criterion D, the potential to yield important information. While it is always possible that additional research into the neighborhood and its associated cultural traditions may yield heretofore unknown and important information, the reasons why the Japanese American community values Japantown are established, understood, and well-researched (see Criterion A).

6. *The NRHP Criteria Considerations should be taken into account.* None of the NRHP Criteria Considerations apply to Japantown as a TCP: the neighborhood is not affiliated with a religious institution, it has not been relocated or reconstructed, it is not a birthplace or grave/cemetery, it is not a place constructed for the purposes of commemoration, and its significance is more than 50 years old.

TCP-Specific Recommendations for Future Action

If San Jose's Japanese American community decides that TCP designation may be desirable, Carey & Co. suggests that in addition to the general recommendations included in the "Recommendations" section of the report, the following TCP-specific tasks be undertaken:

Recommendation One: Investigate the ramifications of TCP designation. So far approximately 78,000 properties around the country have been listed on the NRHP and pros and cons of NRHP listing are well known. However, very few TCPs have been listed, and an even fewer number of these are dense urban neighborhoods like Japantown. As a result of this lack of precedence, the ramifications of TCP designation in this case are not entirely clear. In order to make an informed decision about whether TCP designation should continue, Carey & Co. recommends that community members meet with local city government representatives to discuss how San Jose's historic preservation procedures would apply to the addition, demolition, or alteration of buildings within the district. Similarly, Carey & Co. recommends that community members and/or local city government representatives discuss the uniqueness of the Japantown TCP designation effort with state and federal officials as well as private historic preservation organizations to identify any potential additional funding sources for continued evaluation efforts.

Recommendation Two: Gather community members' comments on Japantown's integrity. According to Bulletin No. 38, the integrity of the district must be considered from the point of view of San Jose's Japanese American community. A formal survey of community members is not required as part of this process. However, Carey & Co. recommends some sort of organized attempt at gathering community members' comments on the issue of integrity in order to avoid discrepancies between how people in the community actually feel and how these feelings are interpreted by whoever is writing the TCP nomination. A one-page written and/or multiple choice questionnaire may be all that is necessary to fulfill this component.